Questions for Paisley Rekdal’s *The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee*

1. What do you think about the narrative structure and the way the travel stories and personal reflection pieces are interwoven?

2. Why does Rekdal begin with the anecdote about her mother meeting Bruce Lee? What does this story have to do with the emerging focus of her memoir – that of identity formation of a biracial person?
   
   - Rekdal says in an interview with Ron Hogan: “She met Bruce Lee before he became the archetype of Asian American kitsch, the exotic kung fu fighter. And I found it odd that the figure that would not assimilate ultimately became successful, while my mother, who was born and raised in America and taught from the get-to to assimilate, could not succeed in the way that she wanted to succeed.”
   
   - P. 4 of David Remy interview

3. What does *The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee* say about cultural assimilation?

4. What does Rekdal’s mother’s refusal to let on that she does not understand Chinese while they are traveling in Taipei help us understand about her conception of her identity?

5. Rekdal suggests that lying and miscommunication, both literal and metaphorical miscommunications, are major themes of this book. Do you agree? Where is this theme apparent?
   
   - Rekdal suggests in an interview with Ron Hogan that many of the misunderstandings (especially while she is in Asia) stem from stories “It goes back to that idea of stories. They had this story about me and how I was supposed to behave, what I was supposed to want to eat, what I was going to look like…based on their idea of what it means to be American. At the same time, I had my story about what it means to be Korean. Somewhere between those two stories was the truth and we could not seem to worm our way through these various stories to actually communicate.”

6. How does physical appearance complicate issues of identity? How does an outsider’s perception of oneself complicate one’s own notion of self?
   
   - “Appearance is the deciding factor of one’s ethnicity, I understand; how I look to the majority of people determines how I should behave and what I should accept to be my primary culture. This is not simply a reaction white America
has to race. If for the past several years I have become a part of white America it is because it has embraced me so fully, because it is everywhere, because it is comfortable to disappear into, and because the Chinese would not recognize me on sight. Any struggle to assert myself as more than what I seem to be is exhausting. A choice, I realized, either could be made by me or asserted for me.” – p 15.

- Reactions to her mother by shopkeepers, etc while they are traveling in Taipei – p19
- Agatha (also complicated by the fact that her mother is white)– p119, 122
- Racial perceptions of Paisley on vacation with two other women (Julie and Trecia in the Philippines
- Idea of difference and the other – p. 207
- Choose of identity- cannot choose one or the other, need to be both – p. 208

7. How are interracial relationships seen throughout the text?
   - “Why would it disgust me more to see a white man kiss a black woman than to see my white father kiss my Chinese mother?” – p 107.
   - Korean girls at school- obsession with Joseph.
   - Paisley’s own confusion over Mark’s attraction to her.
   - Cousin marrying a Latina woman – p. 166

8. How does race and gender influence the notion of the power of voice?
   - Black woman from James Bond movie – p. 123
   - Way women are expected to behave in Korea “Korean feminine ideal” – p. 55
   - Volleyball match- p. 61
   - Women cover their mouths when they laugh or talk – p. 71
   - Young Black woman actor playing Caliban in The Tempest “She growled her singing, poetic lines, often muddying the meaning because she spoke so closely into her chest.” – p. 150
   - By telling this story she is given power of voice and so is her mother – p. 175.
   - Grandfather’s lack of voice
   - P. 5 of David Remy interview

9. What does the story of how her grandfather acquired the laundromat have to do with identity formation? And what does it mean that the story is not true?
   - It is the ability to interpret these myths and modify them to one’s advantage that preserves personal and cultural identity (David Remy review)
   - P. 3 of David Remy interview.

10. How is Paisley’s trip to Natchez, Mississippi and her search for Opal’s history a conclusion to this memoir? Or is it?